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THEOLOGY AND CHRISTIANITY

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THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

A COMPARISON

BY

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CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SOCIETY.

PREFACE

It has seemed best to divide this little book into two parts, in the first of which the system of Theosophy is expounded, all too shortly, but as far as the space allowed of, without criticism. The second part is devoted to a comparison of Theosophy with Christianity.

I must mention that Theosophy as known and practised in Europe and America is all I have attempted to criticise. In India Theosophy takes on something of the colouring of Buddhism and other Eastern religions much more than in Europe, even, I believe, adopting some of their rites.

I have taken the subject chiefly as it is treated by Madam Blavatsky, Mr. Sinnett, Mrs. Besant, Dr. Steiner, and one or two others, whose books are well known and much read, especially having recourse to Mrs. Besant's "Esoteric Christianity," "The Ancient Wisdom," "The Changing World," to Mr. Sinnett's "Esoteric Buddhism," "The

PREFACE

Growth of the Soul," Articles in "*The London Lodge Transactions*," and Dr. Steiner's "Christianity as Mystical Fact," and "An Outline of Occult Science."

M. C. S.

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CONTENTS

PART I

THE SCHEME OF THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO THEOSOPHY

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	WHAT IS THEOSOPHY ?	7
II.	THE THEOSOPHICAL MEANS OF ATTAINING KNOWLEDGE	11
III.	THE THEOSOPHIC DOCTRINE OF THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN	24
IV.	REINCARNATION AND THE LAW OF KARMA	31
V.	THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO THEOSOPHY	39

PART II

THEOSOPHY IN ITS RELIGIOUS ASPECT: CONTRAST WITH CHRISTIANITY

VI.	THE CLAIM OF THEOSOPHY TO BE A RELIGION ...	47
VII.	THEOSOPHICAL TEACHING IN RELATION TO GOD ...	51
VIII.	THE ALLEGORICAL TREATMENT OF OUTWARD FACTS	55
IX.	THEOSOPHY AND THE INCARNATION OF OUR LORD	59

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
X. JESUS CHRIST, BUDDHISM, AND THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES ...	72
XI. THE HIGHER SELF AND THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST ...	80
XII. IS THEOSOPHY COMPATIBLE WITH CHRISTIANITY? ITS ESSENTIAL OMISSIONS ...	83

THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

PART I

THE SCHEME OF THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO THEOSOPHY

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS THEOSOPHY ?

IN writing on this subject it is necessary to indicate exactly the sense in which we are using the name, since it has been applied to various widely differing systems of thought. Strictly speaking, and using the term in its widest meaning, a Theosophist is one who claims to have a special insight into the nature of God, and to be able to explain the Universe as the result of the activities at work within the Divine Essence. Until comparatively recently Theosophy was understood in this wide sense, and was in no wise regarded as relating to a particular religion or sect, or to any special scheme in its teachings about the Universe. Anyone who claimed to

8 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

have a profound insight into the hidden nature of Being might be called a Theosophist, whether he arrived at it by speculative reason, by intuition, or by illumination through revelation. Hence, philosophers such as Spinoza or Hegel, or Christian mystics such as Eckhart or Böhme, might be classed as Theosophists.

The term Theosophy, however, is now used in a much more limited sense, and generally applies to the teaching of a particular Society originally founded by Madame Blavatsky in the year 1875, called the Theosophical Society, since which time its doctrines have spread over a considerable area in America, England, on the Continent of Europe, and in India, in which last named place it found a congenial soil since in much it accords both with Buddhism and the religion of Brahma.

And yet, it is important to note that it is a mistake to regard Theosophy in this modern development as a religion or a sect, although this is a mistake very commonly made. It is true that it deals largely with religious doctrines, but it furnishes no definite creed, insists on no rigid dogmas and prescribes no particular manner of worship or ceremonial, unless, indeed, there may be secret rites not generally known.

Theosophy claims to be the interpreter of all religions rather than to be itself a religion, and

by occult knowledge to explain the inner meaning of rites and ceremonies and mysteries such as have existed in various forms throughout the ages and among all races. And it endeavours to show the relation of these varying forms with each other as all of them efforts to seek union with the Divine, or to attain for man a psychical or spiritual power denied to him on the merely physical plane, as well as to a knowledge hidden from most of us in our present stage of evolution. For this reason the leaders in Theosophy speak of it as the Religion of Religions, because it attempts to understand and to explain them all.

Admitting this claim, then, Theosophy certainly cannot be looked upon as a sect, nor in the ordinary sense as a religion. Indeed, in much of its teaching it is more to be regarded as a philosophy or as a scientific system, than as a religious cult, and with this point of view we will deal first, leaving the more definitely religious features for comparison with Christianity until later.

From this point of view, then, Theosophy claims to offer an explanation of the entire Universe : of its structure, its scheme, its physical, mental, and psychic laws, its spiritual basis, its origin and purpose. Some of what it teaches might be enunciated by any Natural Scientist, if his studies and experiments, as sometimes they

10 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

do, could carry him far enough or happened to lead him to the same conclusions; or by any Psychologist if he could go far enough by his ordinary methods in the study of mind and of the human constitution. And these theories of Theosophy no more necessarily offer a religion than do those of the Physicist, the Geologist, or Biologist.

There is, however, this important difference that, whereas the work of the Scientist often seems at first sight to militate against religion, and to render faith in spiritual things a matter of difficulty, that of the Theosophist undoubtedly acts very powerfully in the opposite direction, and confirms religious faith rather than otherwise. For the Theosophist claims to be able to penetrate to a much deeper layer of facts than those within the ken of Natural Science as at present pursued, which takes little for granted beyond the merely physical facts which lie open to our senses. The former, on the contrary, asserts that he is able to handle truths not amenable to our physical sense, and thus his teaching is the very reverse of materialistic.

The manner in which he claims to do this will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE THEOSOPHICAL MEANS OF ATTAINING KNOWLEDGE

WHILST, as already said, often dealing with the same facts or hypotheses as those handled in the Natural Sciences, the method by which the Theosophist seeks to arrive at his results is very different from that by which the Scientist arrives at his. The latter primarily works inductively from facts which he has learnt from his senses, allowing no weight to anything claiming to be derived from intuition, from innate ideas, or from revelation in any form. His aim is to find out all that we can know with certainty from data contained wholly within the limits of experience on the physical plane. Within these limits he often arrives at very exact knowledge, and his method is excellent as long as he does not attempt to apply it dogmatically to immaterial things which belong to another order of being, an order which he is tempted to deny the existence of just because it will not fall within his system.

12 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

Theosophists profess to arrive at equally exact knowledge, if not more so, on a much deeper plane.

But they accept information which is acknowledged to be by direct revelation given by certain spiritual experts who, they say, have access to facts entirely hidden from ordinary men, these latter having no faculties sufficiently developed by which they could apprehend them. It is stated by Theosophists that there has always existed a Society consisting of Adepts who by almost superhuman efforts of self-control in a system of severe asceticism, as well as by arduous and searching study, and aided by exalted beings from another sphere, have reached a stage of initiation when they become as easily cognisant of psychic and spiritual facts, as we ordinary persons are of material things.

Theosophical teaching rests mainly upon the authority of these alleged Adepts, and is accepted by the majority of its followers with the same sort of unquestioning faith as that by which most Christians embrace the doctrines set forth in the New Testament, or by the Church.

The psychic and spiritual facts of which we are told these Adepts are possessed they are able to reveal to those willing to learn if they regard them as fit subjects for a learning which may prove very dangerous to such as cannot be

trusted to use the knowledge rightly. Their disciples are taught, it is said, by a very special and severe training to be able to discover much for themselves by the development of powers which in most people are as yet latent merely and unfolded. These pupils, after a very prolonged course of study and testing, themselves become Initiates capable of making further discoveries in these recondite subjects and also of instructing others.

The process by which it is claimed that they arrive at some of their knowledge is an interesting one. We will quote from a short explanation of it given by one of the Theosophical Society's acknowledged experts, in a book called "An Outline of Theosophy," where he says that the discovery of any kind of knowledge "is entirely a question of vibration. All information which reaches a man from the world without reaches him by means of vibration of some sort, whether it be through the sense of sight, hearing, or touch. Consequently, if a man is able to make himself sensitive to additional vibrations he will acquire additional information ; he will become what is commonly called 'clairvoyant.' "

" This word, as commonly used," he continues, " means nothing more than a slight extension of normal vision ; but it is possible for a man to become more and more sensitive to the subtler

14 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

vibrations, until his consciousness, acting through many developed faculties, functions freely in new and higher ways. He will then find new worlds of subtler matter opening up before him, though in reality they are only new portions of the world he already knows. He learns in this way that a vast unseen universe exists round him during the whole of his life, and that it is constantly affecting him in many ways, even though he remains blindly unconscious of it. But when he develops faculties whereby he can sense these other worlds it becomes possible for him to observe them scientifically, to repeat his observations many times, to compare them with those of others, to tabulate them, and draw deductions from them."

Granted that this is so. Theosophy professes to supply exact knowledge just where Natural Science acknowledges its impotence. And if indeed there is validity in the claim, and we are not in a position to be able to deny it, we must all acknowledge we owe Theosophy a debt of gratitude.

Not only do the Theosophists, that is those among them who are Initiates, claim to be able to search out occult matters which belong to other planes than that of our world, but they allege that they are able to discover long past events which have happened on the plane of

physical things, but of which there are no existing records, by what they call the Akasic Records. Mr. Sinnett says in his pamphlet on "The Pyramids and Stonehenge": "A great deal of information that could not be obtained in any other way may sometimes be acquired by theosophical students in reference to the plain external history of the world around us. Literary research in such matters very soon reaches the limit of its tether. In dealing with the remote past it is paralysed for want of written records, and at the best can only supplement these by interpreting a few inscriptions on stone. . . . An instrument of research is placed in the hands of theosophic students sufficiently advanced to make use of it, which actually brings a great deal of the ancient history of the earth within the reach of their direct perception. . . . There is a medium in Nature in which pictures, so to speak, of all that has ever taken place on earth are indestructibly preserved for ever. This medium is spoken of in the occult literature of the East as the Akasa. For the exploration of this psychic faculties of a very adept-like order, educated, moreover, with scientific precision, and borne on a highly spiritualised character are required. . ." Tangible objects, it is stated, are connected by permanent magnetic currents with the Akasic Records, and a "trained occultist, by touching

16 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

or handling such tangible objects, is enabled to get upon these currents . . . or it may be enough for him merely to come near them" (the stones of a building, for instance), "and he can follow the magnetic thread of connection which leads back his consciousness to the early events with which they are associated."

This is so nearly akin to a scientific theory in regard to vibrations as to render it a not altogether unfamiliar idea, and to seem even to those very little versed in occult notions, not incredible. For it is well known that vibrations once set going never entirely lose their influence. The circles which spread outwards in ever-increasing diameter in a pond after throwing in a stone never absolutely cease. After reaching the edge of the water the vibrations are communicated to the surrounding land, and although inappreciable to our senses, continue conveying their energy to every stone wall and to every particle of whatever sort with which they may come in contact, leaving thus, as it were, the trace of their passage for ever.

Thus is every word, if one may so put it, imprinted upon the walls of a room, the air having been set in vibratory motion with each word uttered; and similarly every movement is thus impressed, and there are some who think that if only by some invention we could contrive to

become conscious of these records, we could peal off layer after layer, and become aware of every act which had been perpetrated, and every word which had been uttered in a room, or indeed anywhere. It is some power like this that occultists believe themselves in some cases to possess, and whether we may believe it or not, there is a certain rationale in such a claim.

However, naturally, the very first question that arises in all this is, Do these claims lend themselves to credence? Can the knowledge to which the Theosophists thus lay claim be regarded as having any validity? Knowing, as many of us do, the high moral character of the Theosophists taken as a class, their high standard of truth and probity, we may at once dismiss any slightest notion of a want of good faith. That cannot come into question for a moment. Are they, then, possibly self-deceived, are they the victims of illusion? This is a matter we are not in the least in a position to judge. It is on the face of it impossible for us who have no powers or revelations made to us such as described, to deny that others, differently gifted from ourselves, have such powers, or are capable of receiving revelations for which we are not fitted. To deny in such a case would be as presumptuous and ridiculous as it would be for a blind man to deny that most people have a power of sight.

18 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

This being so, we have at least to be humble in our attitude, and to remember that the early Christians had to accept their teachings in just the same way on the authority of persons fitted for great revelations, for which they most of them were quite unfit. We have, therefore, to judge of the teachings given to us by the Theosophist as best we can, bringing to bear, as far as possible, the same methods on which we fall back when any kind of information is presented to us which we cannot possibly test for ourselves.

In such cases we begin with a comparison of the new information with all that we know already to see if it is in contradiction or more or less in accord with it. If it entirely subverts all our previous knowledge, we may perhaps be justified in throwing it aside without further thought. If, on the contrary, it is more or less in harmony with our previous ideas and knowledge, we may accord it some welcome, according to our willingness to give hospitality to fresh ideas, or to the elasticity or openness of our mental constitution. But even in the former case we are by no means always justified in casting anything that seems to subvert our notions aside, since our minds may be so badly furnished with knowledge, and what we have may be so inaccurate, or our prejudices may so blind us, as to render the contradiction we think we detect merely a seeming one, which

a deeper knowledge would resolve. Hence this test is by no means a certain one or too much to be relied upon.

Be this as it may, however, much of the teaching of Theosophy does not present things in contradiction with facts already known to us, or doctrines in which we believe. Most especially is this the case where it has reference to facts or theories of a scientific kind, such as those concerned with the constitution of the Universe, of Matter, and other great physical problems.

In some instances there is no doubt that Theosophists have anticipated some of our modern scientific theories, in others, as a great Scientist has put it, "they go too fast for us," but have asserted as true things which are quite in line with our present scientific theories, and quite likely to be discovered by Science although it has not yet by its own methods climbed to them.

Taken generally, then, there is on the face of it no reason to regard such teachings of Theosophy as come under the head of Cosmology or an effort to explain the constitution of the Universe, as incredible; on the contrary, it sometimes fits in as a further development of what we already know in a manner that is very illuminating. This makes one of the great attractions of Theosophy. It presents such ideas as that of a Spiritual Universe, of continued life after death,

20 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

and other crucial questions of the kind in so reasonable a manner, and shows them to be so entirely in harmony with the very nature of things, that a study of it has converted many a Materialist to a belief in Spirit, and in not a few cases has proved a door by which an Atheist has come back to Christianity.

This being so, we are inclined to attach a considerable value to the teachings of Theosophy in certain directions, and to believe that the claim to unusual means of gaining knowledge may be a just one, especially as there is, to a large extent, unanimity in the findings of Occult Students belonging to different Schools in this line of thought.

But it remains a question how far their teachings can be regarded as accurate, and whether we can depend upon them with a certainty we hardly accord to the hypotheses of ordinary Science. Some Theosophists rely upon them to the very letter. We shall not find ourselves able to do that, and especially we shall find, as is so often the case, that what Theosophy affirms is far more likely to be true than what it denies.

In the matter of trusting to the letter, there are many Theosophists who admit that in the development of their knowledge they often have to correct previous statements which had been

too readily accepted, exactly as the ordinary man of Science often has to do. Therefore it can no more be assented to as final, as the last word on any subject, than can the hypotheses thrown out by scientific experts ; and, like all truth, no matter from what source derived, it must be taken with something more than mere passive acquiescence, not idly, but with an active response which involves the exercise of our reasoning faculties and common sense.

And again, even granting, as we may perhaps be justified in doing, the existence of Adepts in occult things who may be able to attain to knowledge inaccessible to ordinary mortals, even so we must remember that in interpreting it each Adept must give the colouring of his own individuality, and must be liable, on the level even of his own exalted plane, to describe just the particular facet which he sees, to the exclusion of others ; for even on the highest plane that man can attain to, he is not Deity, nor can apprehend the Universe more than in part, and that a small part when compared with the Infinite Whole.

Hence, while we may accept, perhaps, much of the really valuable teaching of Theosophy on Psychology, and regarding the constitution of the Cosmos, it is most unnecessary to think, as some do, that it is binding on them to accept everything it teaches as incontrovertible even

22 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

to the letter, and to throw aside anything in Christianity which may not be in accord with it.

Theosophy, then, we find, claims that it presents an intelligible theory of the Universe, and clears up many of the difficulties which are encountered in speculative thought. This is to a great extent true, for they reconcile many things that have been thought irreconcilable by Science and Philosophy, and, as already hinted, the different phases of being which come under the heads of the Physical, the Psychic, and the Spiritual, are linked together in this system in so orderly a sequence and follow one upon the other so naturally as to remove the apparent incongruity between the spiritual and the physical which has troubled so many minds. "Its theory of physics," to quote Mr. Sinnett, "and its theory of spirituality are not only reconcilable with each other, they are intimately blended together and interdependent." *

Looked at, however, from the more philosophic and religious point of view, the claim that difficulties are cleared up by this system of thought hardly holds good. For instance, some Theosophists maintain that the Free-will controversy is laid once for all. But this is certainly not the case, and the difficulty is thrown in reality only a stage farther back, as could be

* "Esoteric Buddhism," p. 29. Second Edition.

demonstrated were this the place for discussing so recondite a subject. Similarly the insoluble problems of Philosophy remain insoluble still, such as how Being comes to be at all, and how, according to reason, it must have, and yet cannot have had a beginning at all. All these difficulties remain practically untouched beyond being thrown, as stated above, in the case of Free-will, a stage or two further back. Neither is the origin of evil satisfactorily cleared up, unless we accept the not very tenable opinion that evil is merely due to the descent of Spirit into Matter. However, this is no serious indictment to make against Theosophy, since here it only shares the impotence of all systems of thought, religious or otherwise, when we come to first principles.

CHAPTER III

THEOSOPHIC DOCTRINE OF THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN

ROUGHLY speaking this does not in essentials differ from the Christian teaching that the constitution of Man is tri-partite, namely, consists of body, soul and spirit. But Theosophy carries it into more detail. Body and Soul being each divisible again into three, making Man to consist of seven principles.

These seven principles are described by different writers under varying names, which sometimes produces confusion. Mr. Sinnett gives a different naming in his later book, "The Growth of the Soul," from that which he gives in "Esoteric Buddhism," and it will be best here to give both his systems of naming side by side.

"Esoteric Buddhism" calls the 7 divisions "The Growth of the Soul" gives the 7 as

1. The Body.
2. Vitality.
3. Astral Body.
4. Animal Soul.

1. Physical Body.
2. Etheric Double.
3. Jiva.
4. The Astral Vehicle.

- | | |
|--------------------|------------|
| 5. Human Soul. | 5. Manas. |
| 6. Spiritual Soul. | 6. Buddhi. |
| 7. Spirit. | 7. Atma. |

There is not much important difference here, for in the majority of cases it is merely the substitution of the Indian name; but 3 and 4 present a little confusion, easily cleared up because 3 is said to have been miscalled when spoken of as the Astral Body; however, Dr. Rudolph Steiner, who has produced the most modern development of Theosophy, and of whom we shall have much to speak later, adheres to the name of Astral Body for 3. Mrs. Besant uses in some cases different names again, but it does not seem of much consequence as long as we bear these slight variations in mind.

There is no need to dwell upon the first of these divisions. The second, Vitality, or the Etheric Double, is, we are told, the principle which distinguishes the organic plane from the inorganic, and here we see the Theosophist decides for himself the scientific controversy concerning "Vitalism," a solution certainly in harmony with our Christian thought. The third in the list guides the Vital principle "in its work on the physical particles, and causes it to build up the shape which these assume." * . . . The "three lower principles . . . are altogether of the earth,

* "Esoteric Buddhism," p. 23. Second Edition.

26 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

perishable in their nature as a single entity, though indestructible as regards their molecules, and absolutely done with by man at death." *

These three, roughly speaking, correspond with what we ordinarily call the body, and Theosophy tells us that the permanent self draws to itself a covering by the accretion of atoms from the material or lower planes of the universe, and that these are discarded at death as mere accretions. This throws an interesting light upon the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

The fourth principle, the Animal Soul, belongs to the higher nature, and is sometimes called the "Body of Desire" or the "Vehicle of Will." This principle is shared with us by animals, and it is the fifth which marks man off as strictly human, namely the "Human Soul" or "Manas." Theosophy states that this is the seat of reason and of memory, which interestingly endorses the emphatic teaching of M. Bergson that memory does not primarily lie in the brain. It is this principle also which, according to Theosophy, can by certain Adepts be projected from the body and appear at a distance. It is stated that in an ordinary human being this part of his constitution is very imperfectly developed, and that if it were otherwise, and its powers in full use, we should have a greatly heightened

* "Esoteric Buddhism," p. 24. Second Edition.

apprehension of the nature of things and be able to perform deeds now impossible to most of us. This fifth principle is very much more developed in some human beings than in others, as is evidenced by comparing savages with civilised people, or the very ignorant with the highly educated.

The sixth principle, or Buddhic, sometimes called the Bliss-body, or the Spiritual Soul, is, we are told, so exalted that in comparatively few persons is it developed at all beyond an embryo stage. It is this highly spiritual principle which is arrived at by the Saints, and it was this principle which was so earnestly sought by the Ancients in their Mysteries. It is this, too, that the modern Initiate aims at.

The last, or seventh principle, Atma, is pure Spirit, and wholly beyond our ken at present.

We must not conceive of these seven principles in Man's constitution as separate from or independent of each other. They are closely associated, and it is only the clumsiness of our speech, so ill adapted for expressing these ultra-physical things, that obliges us to speak as if the principles occupied space, and were contained one within the other. They are intimately blended, as it were, and interpenetrate in a way we have no words to express, and little power of forming a conception of.

28 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

The lower ones are, however, separable, and at death the lowest three are thrown off and ultimately dissolved into their component parts or atoms.

This septenary constitution of man gives a clue to the explanation of what has recently been so much talked of under the names of the "subliminal self," or the "sub-conscious" or "super-conscious" or "the psychic."

It helps also to correct a mistake very often made in books treating of the sub-conscious, which consists in confounding it with the Spiritual. We are too apt, as we have said elsewhere,* to confound the Psychic with the Spiritual, and to think that if we can develop certain psychical powers we are becoming deeply spiritual, and that effects produced by suggestion, for instance, or by *clairvoyance*, or automatic writing, or by a medium in the so-called spiritualistic *séances*, etc., are equivalent to a direct draught upon the Divine. Some have rightly suspected that there are, as it were, different layers in the Unseen, some being much higher than others. If the Theosophist treatment of the subject has any truth in it, this is explained, and in all these spiritualistic proceedings, these automatic writings and so on, we may be, and probably are, tapping

* "The Truth and Error of Christian Science." Second Edition, pp. 151 *et seq.*

a phase of being not only vastly inferior to the Spiritual, but as the Theosophists very warningly aver, spheres open to very evil and dangerous influences. A person in whom the Psychic is much developed may be anything but spiritually minded, and the phenomena produced must not be too readily accepted as religious experiences.

This is why the spiritual directors of Christian Mystics have always been so cautious in accepting their experiences as healthy and of value, and have often used severe tests in order to be sure that they are not merely due to the opening of a door, so to speak, upon the psychic plane through hysteria or some other morbid development.

If one may take it for granted that the Theosophic doctrine regarding the septenary constitution of Man is true—and it is difficult to bring any conclusive argument against it, especially as it comes in so naturally as an extension of the tri-partite division ordinarily taught—it would seem that these different planes are not necessarily developed in the same order in any given individual. There have been many Christian Saints of high spiritual attainment who have developed almost no psychic powers at all, and it is to the growth of the spiritual principle that Christianity devotes itself, and its teachers have never aimed at the development of the lower or

30 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

more pyschic planes. This neglect of effort to arrive at psychic powers has been a very powerful safeguard in the process of reaching great spiritual heights on the part of saintly persons. The Theosophists would seem to aim definitely at the development of all the principles, but they have their own safeguards.

CHAPTER IV

REINCARNATION AND THE LAW OF KARMA

WE have now considered the Theosophic teaching on the constitution of Man ; we have to consider his destiny, and this brings us to the doctrine of Reincarnation, which the Theosophists regard as their great central doctrine. This is the teaching, as Mr. Sinnett puts it, " that the growth and development of the human soul is accomplished by means of successive returns to physical life with intervening periods of rest." Unless the process of growth be hastened by initiation or in some other manner, this means that the individual returns to the earth life perhaps millions of times before he has achieved anything approaching to full manhood on the higher planes of his being. His development from life to life, unless he take great pains with himself and undertake a severe course of discipline, is almost inappreciable, and in many cases he goes backwards rather than forwards. Consequently, the

experience of countless incarnations is necessary. The permanent principles in Man are evolved from a merely embryonic stage to full development by his response to and conflict with outward conditions until he reaches a point at which his evolution can go forward without a physical environment. It would need a long and elaborate explanation to show how, in Theosophic teaching, this growth by contact with physical surroundings is accomplished, and we must refer the reader to Mrs. Besant's "Ancient Wisdom" for a full account of it, and content ourselves here with a short statement of the alleged facts in regard to reincarnation.

The Ego, or spiritual immortal individual, having passed through one life here, passes into a state of existence called Devachan. The length of time spent, according to our earth notions of time, in this state, before taking up a new life here, varies with the conditions of each individual, but has usually been put at about two or three thousand years, sometimes less; thus, taking our modern civilisation as a whole, we are said to be the reincarnation of the old Romans, of those who lived in the Roman state of civilisation that about corresponds to ours. This might not be true of every individual, for some people may have had a longer Devachanic period, and others a shorter, perhaps having been last in this

world only a few centuries ago, or even less, but true of us as a whole.

There is now an idea put forth that we are at present developing so much faster than we did, that this period is much shorter, and a new life may be entered upon in this world comparatively quickly.

There are, we are told, many planes in Devachan, some of which are so high that very few attain to them, not being developed enough. If a man's life has been a fairly good one, he will pass into a phase of Devachanic being which is happy, perhaps very happy, according to what, for him, constitutes happiness. But if his life has been less good, it will be less happy, and if it has been a degraded life, what he may have to experience is such that no Christian description of Hell could exceed it, or perhaps equal it. He may find himself in a phase of existence full of ghastly horrors, of which the experiences one reads of through which a man in *delirium tremens* goes may give some very faint suggestion. In Devachan, where each person, as it were, "goes to his own," it used to be taught that the Ego ceased for the time being to make any further progress in moral growth, but just existed happily or unhappily as the case might be, until he was ready for a fresh descent into this world. Now, however, many teach that the Ego goes through

34 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

a very considerable process of education in this state, in which he is able to look back upon the life he has just passed through in a manner that is instructive and profitable. This may perhaps depend upon the stage of growth at which he has already arrived.

Leaving out of account the low and terrible Devachanic condition the very degraded go through, it would seem, from what we are told, that the vast majority pass into a phase very little removed in its conditions from those that obtain here, especially speaking from the ethical point of view. Theosophists tell us that the "controls" which spiritualists claim to have touch with through a medium, or those who do automatic writing through their script, are rarely on a plane much higher than ours, and can give very little information of any value as to the higher phases of spiritual life. In fact their information would be extremely local, so to speak. Their knowledge extends not much farther than our own, and their statements are apt to be very misleading.

Reincarnation must not be confounded with Transmigration, a doctrine sometimes taught in the East, which teaches that human souls may incarnate in animals. The Theosophists deny this, and Mr. Sinnett avers that the descent of human souls under any circumstances into

animal bodies never occurs, although after a bad life a soul may reincarnate into a very inferior human condition from that in which he was before.

According to this teaching, persons that we have been closely associated with in past lives are apt to be reincarnated at the same time that we are, and it is now in our power to expiate any wrong we may have done them, and in theirs to make any reparation for ill-treatment we may have received from them. Thus a person who may, for instance, find himself obliged to live in this life with some one who is extremely annoying and disagreeable to him will reflect that he has probably been in some way equally disagreeable to that same person in a past life, and cease to feel resentment.

What the next reincarnation shall be depends upon what is called the Karma which an individual has made for himself in the life just past or brought over, as yet unworked out, from previous lives. The Law of Karma is tantamount to the principle that as we sow so shall we reap. Karma is the result of our past actions. An evil life produces a bad Karma and will entail in some way great unhappiness in the succeeding life or lives. A good life produces a good Karma. Every reincarnation will be into circumstances exactly appropriate to the Karma which has been

36 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

produced, so that the conditions of the new life shall be such as to tend to correction of the faults and vices which have been developed, acting as punishment which is corrective rather than revengeful. It is said to act as unfailingly as the law of cause and effect in the physical world. Consequently, Theosophists take unhappiness in their lives with philosophic resignation, even more, with a cheerful acquiescence, holding that in a past life or lives they must have deserved it, and that they are only working out results produced by themselves, although they have no recollection of their past deeds.

“The bodily form,” * says Mr. Sinnett, “to which the soul is drawn back is not selected at random. . . . Governed by the all-sufficient discernment of Nature, the soul ripe for Reincarnation finds its expression in a body which affords it the exact conditions of life which Karma—in this sense, its desert—requires.” Here it may well be asked, “But what about heredity?” The answer is that the soul, guided by a process of assimilation of the right physical conditions selects, in a sense automatically, a body which inherits physically from the parents just the right conditions for the reincarnating individual. The process of selection is presided over by Beings of great wisdom called the Lords of Karma.

* “The Growth of the Soul,” p. 59. Second Edition.

There are many complicated and difficult problems involved in the doctrine of Karma. It seems at first sight fatalistic, as if all that happens in the present life were determined altogether by the consequences of the actions in our past lives, and this is a criticism frequently made against the doctrine of Karma. But it is, at any rate, partially saved from that by the fact that, if we cannot alter the effect of Karma already made, we can at any rate considerably control what Karma we are now making, and therefore what shall be the effect of it on our next life. By accepting our present conditions, the result of our past, patiently and cheerfully, and by living a good life, we can work out the evil results of the past and create good Karma for the future, and the will is free to do this. We shall allude to this again in later criticism.

The doctrine does not clear up the philosophic problems in connection with the Free-will controversy, as some claim, affecting them neither one way nor the other. Theosophy takes Free-will for granted, just as Christianity does, in spite of the difficulties which are insoluble on this present plane of thought.

Perhaps one may roughly define Karma, as taught by the Theosophists, as the character we have developed by our acts and thoughts in our past lives, which in the present life tends to draw

38 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

to itself circumstances and events appropriate to it, especially those likely to correct all that is bad, and to draw out that which is good, if we will allow it, and accept with willingness all that it brings.

CHAPTER V

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNIVERSE ACCORDING TO THEOSOPHY

WE have hitherto considered the teaching of Theosophy on the constitution of Man. We now take up its theories on that of the Universe. Its teaching on the subject of Cosmology is so extremely elaborate and complicated that it can be scarcely more than hinted at here. The doctrine of Evolution receives an enlargement on so huge a scale that the modern scientific theory, as far as yet discovered, is as dust in the balance in comparison. Nevertheless, the Theosophical treatment includes the ordinary scientific doctrine, filling up some of the gaps, solving some of the puzzles, correcting over-hasty generalisations, and amplifying it almost to the power of infinity.

According to Theosophy the evolution of Man involves many more worlds than the one we know. Not only Man generally, but *each individual* must pass through innumerable worlds, and many

40 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

times through the same world before he is ready to pass on to the next. He has to make the round of the seven most important planets of our system, each planet answering to one of the seven principles in his constitution, some being suitable for the evolution of the more spiritual part of him, and some for the more material.

There are many chains of planets involved besides the particular chain with which we are acquainted. But for the sake of simplicity it is best to leave all the other chains alone, and to confine our attention to the system on which we find ourselves now evolving, which is called the Earth chain because our earth is in it. We have to pass through this particular chain of planets seven times before starting our course on another chain.

Before going further it is best to point out that Theosophy, in common with the Easterns, makes much of the number seven. For the Theosophist it is not accidental that there are seven colours in the spectrum which come within our powers of sight, or that in Music the scale is divided into octaves containing seven tones. Man's constitution, as we have seen, is sevenfold and the available planes in this chain and in all the others through which we must travel are seven. There are, they tell us, seven kingdoms of Nature and not merely the three we ordinarily talk about,

the Animal, the Vegetable, and the Mineral. Below the last named there are other kingdoms in so undeveloped a state that we know little or nothing about them. Many other systems of seven will easily occur to the reader.

But to return to the journey of each individual as he runs his course in the process of this mighty evolution. As already stated, arrived on this particular system of planets, we shall have to make the round of them seven times. On each planet the individual must evolve through seven Races of Mankind, these being called the Root-races. And in the process of passing through a Root-race, he must pass through seven sub-races, and so on. When he has accomplished his evolution through the seven sub-races of each Root-race, he is at last ready to pass on to the next planet.

The question arises, Where are we ? At what stage in this mighty process have we arrived ?

We have already, it seems, made the round of this chain of planets, the Earth chain, three times. We are passing through it now for the fourth time. In this fourth round we have already passed through three of the planets, with their Races, sub-races and so on. We have arrived in this fourth round of the chain quite obviously, at the Earth. Of the seven rounds we have to make on the Earth we have made

42 · THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

three, and are now doing our fourth round. Before we began any of our evolution on the Earth we were last in Mars. But that was countless æons ago. Countless æons hence we shall be forging our way through Mercury. Our concern, however, at present is with the Earth, where we, happily, find ourselves on more familiar ground.

Here, on the Earth, we attain to our most physical or material stage. When we were in Mars we were going through a physical stage, but it was less densely so than that through which we are passing now on the Earth. In the planet before Mars we were in a pre-physical state of development. In Mercury we shall be on an upward road and less physical than here, though still somewhat so. In the planet that succeeds that we shall be, not pre-physical, but super-physical. That is consoling; but it will be many a billion years before we arrive there.

To return to the Earth. We are now, as already said, making our fourth round upon it. We have yet three more to make, but our present one will yet take some millions of years, so we will confine our attention to this fourth round. At what stage have we arrived in it? Through what Race and sub-race are we somewhat tediously developing?

It seems we have already passed through four

of the Root-races (what a comfort!), and are now toiling through the sub-races of the fifth Root-race. As we went through the preceding Root-races, we evolved immeasurably as we went, changing from a stage of existence in the first Race in which our bodies were merely gaseous, or nearly so, without definite shape, sexless, speechless, and without memory or power of thought, until by the time the fourth Root-race has been reached, namely the Atlantean, most of these things have developed by slow degrees. The Atlantean Race, like all the rest, had to develop from stage to stage, as it passed through its seven sub-races. In the first of these the Atlanteans attained to speech, in the second to ambition and the power of looking forward, and so on. By the time it arrived at the fifth sub-race it had begun the power of thought, and this continued to develop more and more during the passage through the succeeding sub-races, the last of which was the Mongolian.

These sub-races of the fourth Root-race some of them still populate a great part of the world, for there is no hard and fast line dividing the races, marking a definite beginning or ending, and they therefore often overlap each other.

But we in our part of the world belong to the fifth Root-race, which is the Aryan. This Race, of course, like the others, has to develop through

44 · THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

seven sub-races. We are in the fifth sub-race, the Teutonic, in which language and the power of Reason are highly developed.

We are, as we are told, just about to enter into the sixth * sub-race, in which those of the human race who have developed enough to belong to it, will attain to powers beyond anything we know as yet, the higher principles in our seven-fold constitution being brought much more into manifestation. This, it may be remarked by the way, might account for some of the sporadic psychic developments which have appeared of late, and which, as yet, not having taken their true place, are not seen in their true perspective, and work often in ways that are neither healthy nor desirable. Yet these things may be for-runners of much that is to come, but in disorderly fashion which prevents them from working in harmony with and in subjection to the essential truths of Christianity.

Many, according to Theosophic teaching, are already born who belong to this sixth sub-race, for these different races come in gradually, and persons here and there of advanced thought in social or other matters, or who are exceptionally gifted in some way, especially such as are able to

* Some Theosophists give the numbering of the races rather differently, but it does not make any very essential difference, though a little confusing sometimes.

penetrate through present-day prejudices and are able to look far ahead, may be scattered members of the sixth sub-race. Some say that the present tremendous upheaval has to do with its coming in.

The fifth sub-race, the one said now to be nearing its close, has been running for about a million years, and according to Theosophic statements, we have yet two more sub-races of the fifth Root-race to go through before beginning our fifth round on this planetary chain.

To sum up the statements as to where we exactly are in this stupendous process, we are now passing through this chain of planets for the fourth time, and in this fourth round we have already accomplished our evolution in three of the planets, and are now on the Earth. We have made three of the seven rounds we have to pass through on the Earth, and are now working through the fourth round. In this fourth round on the Earth we have already evolved through four Root-races and are now in the fifth of these, the Aryan, that is that part of Mankind which is in our part of the world. Of the seven sub-races of which the fifth Root-race consists, we have nearly worked through the fifth sub-race, and are just about to enter upon the development involved in the sixth sub-race, the great powers we are to attain to in it being as yet scarcely revealed.

Although, in these many circuits in one planet,

46 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

and many rounds in this and other planetary systems, we appear to move in circles, we never really go back to the same stage that has been worked through, since this return upon our steps is made, as it were, in a spiral, and we pass over the same ground on a higher plane than before, and in a state of higher evolution.

All this is extremely complicated, but it is a small part of the whole as set forth in the system of Theosophy ; the process of developing up to the highest destiny of Man is a matter of æons upon æons, and of time that is unthinkable.

One more word about our passage into the sixth sub-race which is to attain to a level of evolution so vastly beyond the one that is just ending. Nothing of truth which has been learnt in all these past cycles will be lost. All the truths of Religion, Philosophy and Science, of Ethics and Sociology will be carried over into the sixth race, but be immeasurably expanded and widened and deepened, whilst all that is untrue will be thrown away, drop off, and the race of Man be delivered from his hampering mistakes and prejudices.

PART II

THEOSOPHY IN ITS RELIGIOUS ASPECT. CONTRAST WITH CHRISTIANITY

CHAPTER VI

THE CLAIM OF THEOSOPHY TO BE A RELIGION

WE have now described as shortly as we can the system of Theosophy in so far as it may be regarded as a connected body of theories or facts about the Universe and the evolving entities it contains, and thus far, we think it justifies the statement that it is less a religion than a science. One Theosophic writer tells us that it gives us facts about the Unseen, but "offers them not as the religions do as matters of faith, but as subjects of study."

There are, however, some that claim, not only that Theosophy is a religion but that it is the Religion of religions, that it includes them all, includes them, as it were, as genus contains

48 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

species. Mrs. Besant, in "The Ancient Wisdom," speaks of it as "an all-embracing religion and ethic." If this were so, Christianity would have to take its place, not as the crowning religion of all, but as one among many which find their truth in Theosophy. Perhaps Mr. Leadbeater gives a more satisfactory statement of its claims in this respect when he says in his "Outline of Theosophy," that "it is not itself a religion, but it bears to the religions the same relation as did the ancient philosophies. It does not contradict them, but explains them." "It may be described," he continues, "to the outside world, as an intelligent theory of the universe."

Nevertheless, as in its explanation of the universe, it claims amongst much else to explain the why and the wherefore of rituals, the inner processes concerned in the Mysteries connected with Sacraments, and other essentials of religion, it necessarily has a religious aspect, offering us interpretations of religion if not itself a religion, and thus it comes up against Christianity, and the relation between the two is a matter of much importance. It is proposed, after touching on the points of agreement, to pay especial attention to the essential points of contrast.

We will take the main points of agreement first.

To begin with, Theosophy lays fully as much stress on the spiritual basis of all things as does

Christianity, and they are therefore both of them anti-materialistic in their teaching.

Nextly, they both believe in Revelation, that is in the imparting of truth to Man, which is unattainable by his ordinary means of experience and inference therefrom, by Divine or supernatural instruction or agency.

They are agreed also in the doctrine of Love as the great essential in human conduct.

There are many more points of agreement if we turn to any exposition of the Theosophical system, but for the sake of brevity and clearness we will quote passages from Leadbeater's "Outline of Theosophy," and see how far Christianity endorses them.

"God exists, and He is good. He is the great lifegiver who dwells within us, is undying and eternally beneficent. He is not heard or seen, nor touched, yet is perceived by the man who desires perception."

"Man is immortal, and his future is one whose glory and splendour has no limit."

"A Divine law of absolute justice rules the world, so that each man is in truth his own judge, the dispenser of glory or gloom to himself, the decree of his life, his reward, his punishment."

"In spite of appearances, all things are definitely and intelligently moving together for good."

50 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

"The true man is a soul . . . he must therefore regard everything from the standpoint of the soul, and . . . in every case when an internal struggle takes place he must realise his identity with the higher and not the lower. . . . What we commonly call his life is only one day in his true and larger life . . . and death . . . is by no means the end of life, but merely the passage from one stage to another."

We might continue to quote copiously passages, such as the above, which are, in the main, quite in accord with the teachings of Christianity, and where Theosophic teaching differs from Christianity we shall find lies more in what is left out, not stated at all, than in what is positively given.

CHAPTER VII

THEOSOPHICAL TEACHING IN RELATION TO GOD

It has been said that the Theosophists give no teaching about God, that their teaching in fact altogether excludes the idea of Him. It is true that in some of their earlier books God is scarcely mentioned, or, if at all, as an abstraction with little practical bearing on their system.

In many of the more recent books on Theosophy, however, there is very explicit teaching on this subject. We have already seen that in the "Outline" just quoted from there is a statement of the existence of God which leaves little to be desired, as far as it goes, from the Christian point of view, and in Mrs. Besant's writings God is the very centre of the system.

In "The Ancient Wisdom," on page 5, she posits as first among spiritual truths—

- i. One eternal infinite incognisable real Existence.
- ii. From THAT the manifested God, unfolding

52 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

from unity to duality, from duality to trinity.”

And on page 18 she states emphatically that “Nothing can exist in which the Deity is not immanent.”

Again, in her “*Esoteric Christianity*,” on page 253 she writes, “All fruitful study of the Divine Existence must start from the affirmation that it is One. All the Sages have thus proclaimed It; every religion has thus affirmed It. One only without a second. ‘Hear, O Israel,’ cried Moses: ‘The Lord our God is one Lord.’ ‘To us there is but one God,’ declares St. Paul. . . . One Existence unbounded, known in Its fullness only to Itself.”

“But,” she continues, “as the Manifested God, the One appears as Three. A Trinity of Divine Beings, One as God, Three as manifested Powers.”

Mr. Leadbeater, too, in his “*Outline*,” lays down the existence of God as the first and greatest of Theosophical principles. But he says, “We distinguish between God as the Infinite Existence, and the manifestation of this Supreme Existence as a revealed God, evolving and guiding a universe. Only to this limited manifestation should the term ‘a personal God’ be applied. God in Himself is beyond the bounds of personality.” He means *more* than personality, not *less*. And then he quotes that God is “in all and through all,”

and continues “ and indeed *is* all ; and of the Infinite, the Absolute, the All, we can only say, ‘ He *is.* ’ ”

This statement in regard to Deity differs from the Christian statement, but is, at least, a strong assertion of the existence of God.

Mrs. Besant is at much pains to point out that the doctrine of the Trinity, the Three in One, is to be found in varying forms in all Eastern religions, a fact that is necessarily very interesting to the student of comparative religions. But here, in the contrast between Theosophy and Christianity, it is the teaching relative to the Logos or the Word which is of most importance. It is here, in fact, that perhaps the most crucial difference between Theosophy and Christianity comes out, and all the more markedly because there is also so very strong a similarity in the doctrine.

The term Logos is used in Theosophy, and also, it would seem, in the East, as applying to the Christian use of the word “ God,” and the Trinity is thus included in the Logos, the Three Persons being sometimes distinguished as the First Logos, the Second Logos, and the Third Logos, or by other names with which we need not now be concerned. Mr. Leadbeater speaks in his “ Outline ” of the great “ Guiding Force or Deity ” of our universe, as the Logos, to whom must be

54 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

attributed love, wisdom, power, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and all other Godlike attributes, and that "in Him we live and move and have our being," quoting St. Paul. He speaks, as many of the other writers do, of the Logos as Three in One; nevertheless, the term Logos in Theosophy is often used as it is used in Christianity, as applying to the Second Person of the Trinity.

This important subject will be treated in a later chapter.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ALLEGORICAL TREATMENT OF OUTWARD FACTS

A MARKED characteristic of Theosophy is that it almost invariably treats the outward or historical "facts" of Christianity as true only in a symbolical sense, and it reduces everything to Allegory. This does not imply that they consider no truth whatever attaches to the events, for they regard, and rightly, Allegory as an expression of truth, and truth often of a very profound character, but it does mean that they do not look upon any of the supernatural events either of the Old Testament or the New as historical, as having literally happened in this our world.

For instance, in "The Esoteric Basis of Christianity" of W. Kingsland, a treatment of Theosophy, perhaps a little out of date now, but which is still to a considerable extent characteristic of much of this kind of teaching, it is expressly stated that the "Fall" is simply the

descent into matter of human souls from the more ethereal planes, and the "Resurrection" is the rise again into the spiritual state. The New Testament deals with the nature and conditions of this redemption from Matter under the type of Christ. "As in the Old Testament," says Kingsland, "the divine becomes human, so in the New Testament the human re-becomes divine. The New Testament contains in the form of a historical allegory the conditions of man's redemption, of his return to the spiritual planes of being plus that self-consciousness, that knowledge of good and evil which is the purpose of his incarnation.

Similarly, the crucifixion typifies the crucifixion of our material being, and was not a historical event. St. Paul's "Christ living within us is to each person union with his Higher self." "And this must take place here and now by our own conscious efforts, and not as a miraculous dispensation of Providence."

There is much of this kind of treatment of the Gospel facts in modern Theosophical books as well. Dr. Rudolph Steiner, in his "Christianity as Mystical Fact," says that in the history of a man, in the development of the Divine within him, or, as it is so often expressed, the finding of the Higher Self, "The Son appears to be born of a virgin, the soul having seemingly given birth to

him without impregnation." This is rather a striking instance of reducing the facts related in the Gospels to allegory, regarding them as mystic truths expressed in symbols.

Then take again this from Mrs. Besant's "Esoteric Christianity." She quotes it from Eliphas Levi's "The Mysteries of Magic." "The Gospel . . . is the sublime narration of what is and what always will be." Most true. "Ever will the Saviour of the world be adored by the kings of intelligence, represented by the Magi ; ever will He multiply the eucharistic bread, to nourish and comfort our souls ; ever, when we invoke Him in the night and the tempest, will He come to us walking on the waters ; ever will He stretch forth His hand and make us pass over the crests of the billows ; ever will He cure our distempers and give back light to our eyes ; ever will He appear to His faithful, luminous and transfigured upon Tabor."

It must be well borne in mind, as already said, that with the Theosophists allegory is taken in its profoundest aspect and that it means for them reality in a very extreme sense. We may speak of allegory as they use it as *living* allegory, as distinguished from the mere fanciful expression of a thought with which we meet so much in literature. It is the *separation of it from any outward and physical fact*, the entire suppression

58. THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

of the latter in belief which renders it anti-Christian. Otherwise there is nothing to object to in most of these allegorical renderings in themselves. For the deeper a truth, the more does it lend itself to a variety of mystical interpretations until in the case of the ultimate and eternal verities, such possible renderings in allegory or in parable may be infinite, all of them presenting some aspect of the truth, all of them throwing fresh lights, revealing greater depths, and bringing out the unfathomable riches of eternal things. There is nothing peculiar to Theosophy in this. St. Paul, the Fathers and all deeply thinking Christians continually enrich spiritual thought in this way. But to the Christian, the loss of the historical, the outer expression of these great verities in physical events is incalculable. It not only impoverishes the revelation of truth by cutting off one of its aspects and thus rendering it partial and incomplete, but it deprives it of its most vital link with Man in his present physical environment here and now ; it leaves these verities in the air, as it were, unfocussed in Man, hence, for the majority unattainable and unrealisable, of which more presently.

CHAPTER IX

THEOSOPHY AND THE INCARNATION OF OUR LORD

WHEREAS, when Theosophy first began to propagate its teachings, it took almost no account of Christianity, and in so far as it did notice it, it was generally with marked prejudice and total misunderstanding, of late years there has been a decided approach on the side of Theosophy towards Christianity. This is clearly manifest in some of Mrs. Besant's writings, and is still more evident in those of the most recent exponent of Theosophy, Dr. Rudolph Steiner.

Into this approach we shall especially enquire, and naturally the enquiry will centre itself upon the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here we shall find allegory again playing a potent part. The story in the Gospels is in the main reduced to it. Let us see how Dr. Steiner handles it.

He says that the authors of the Gospels "do not profess to give a historical biography," but "the typical life of a Son of God," by which he

means a great Initiate such as the Buddha. The origin of the Gospels, he says, is purely mystical, and the Evangelists were Initiates who consciously drew from mystical traditions, giving the eternal verities in terms of a story which purports to be a more or less biographical account of an actual man, but which is meant to be a symbolical representation of a great spiritual truth. What a loss here of the freshness, the unconscious, almost matter-of-fact simplicity with which the Gospels, to the eye of the Christian, are written, and which to him is so precious, the unsophistication going so far to prove their truth, the simplicity, too, apart from the astounding facts so ingenuously depicted, constituting so much of their charm !

Dr. Steiner thus accounts for the great likeness there is in many respects, and certainly very striking ones, in the events related in the life of Jesus and those in the life of Buddha, and, we may add, in the ancient accounts of almost all the great founders of religions.

This last-mentioned fact, the coincidence of events in the recorded biographies of these great Personalities, is considered by Theosophists to be a complete proof of the lack of historical verity in the Gospel story.

It would seem to some of us to verify the story rather than otherwise, for a supreme Eternal

Event in such intimate touch with Humanity would be likely to burst through, as it were, yes, even time after time, more or less manifesting itself, glinting through matter, if we may so put it, in prognostication of itself, giving hints of the full revelation yet to come, drawing the minds of men in that direction, and falling in with the human tendency for history to repeat itself, until the supreme moment arrives for its culmination.

We have seen Dr. Steiner's treatment of the events of the Gospels. We will now turn to Mrs. Besant's. She allows that the Logos took possession for awhile of the body of a very saintly man named Jesus, at the time of His baptism, but she does not regard it as an Incarnation of the Son of God in the sense that Christianity does. In her book, "The Changing World,"* she writes: "In those days when many knew, when many understood, a distinction was drawn between Jesus and Christ. . . . for there was a difference between the human body of the mighty disciple Jesus, born in Bethlehem, and the divine Power that came down upon that body at the point of time marked as the Baptism, when it is written, "the Spirit of God came down upon Him and abode with Him"; there you have marked the

* Pp. 147, 148.

62 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

Coming of the Christ, the consecration of the Supreme Teacher. That distinction you find recognised in the Epistles, though no attention is drawn to it further in the Gospels after that startling and suggestive statement ; but if you take the Pauline epistles you find yourself in quite a different atmosphere from that of the history as told in the Gospels ; you find there the name of Christ in a new meaning, a mystical meaning of profoundest import ; you find St. Paul declaring that he does not ask to know Him after the flesh, it is the inner Christ he seeks ; you find him saying of that mystic Christ that He has to be born in the believer—a statement that could never have been made of the physical body of Jesus. You find him declaring that that mystic birth of the Christ in human souls is to be followed by a growth of the mystic Christ within the believer, until at last he has reached the measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ. That is the mystic Christian life, the Christ born in the soul, unfolding His divine powers as the Christian grows in wisdom and in love, showing Himself more and more manifest as the human life unfolds to the divine, until the perfect Christ is manifest and the Son of God is seen again on earth. But that old mystical idea slipped out of the Church teachings. . . . And so He who was the inspiring Spirit, the Supreme

Teacher, the all-pervading life of His Church, became the outside Saviour, who by a physical sacrifice was said to have made atonement between God and man; and you had a vicarious atonement, a legal substitution, instead of that identity of nature which made the Christ and the believer one."

Here we note the careful separation drawn between Jesus and Christ. The passage is an interesting one as giving the mystical teaching of St. Paul in a most sympathetic and understanding manner. At the same time it manifests a complete ignorance of the teaching of Christianity, which it cannot be too strongly asserted never lost this Pauline mysticism. An "outside Saviour" was never postulated *instead of* "that identity of nature which made the Christ and the believer one" but *in union with it*. There is nothing inconsistent with this mystical identity in the Saviour's condescending to take our physical nature upon Him. On the contrary, it would seem that this mystical identity with Man would be greatly helped, not hindered, by taking the nature of Man in its entirety, if indeed it might not be an absolute necessity. For the completion and wholeness of a supreme Eternal Event we should expect both an outside and an inner aspect, or the event would be only partial and one-sided.

64 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

This is just one of the specious statements, a mixture of truth and untruth, so often made by critics of Christianity, who have only taken it in its most shallow form, and have remained blinded to its deeper meaning. Meeting the same truths put in a rather different form and under another name they respond to it with enthusiasm, and then declare that Christianity does not contain them. The very crudest Evangelical teaching lays the greatest stress upon oneness with Christ, identity with Him for those who have eyes to see without prejudice.

And so, although this interesting passage gives the teaching of St. Paul with singular insight, and indeed the mystical element could hardly be better expressed, one fails to see any proof in it that Jesus was not the Incarnate Word. The argument about our Lord's body carries no logical weight, and has all the less value because actually inconsistent with Theosophical teaching about the constitution of man. For no one teaches more rationally and understandingly the connection of the physical body with Spirit than the Theosophist, when he lays stress upon the several layers, each being, as we proceed upwards from the densest, more ethereal than the last, and yet all so blended that there is no hard and fast line between one phase and the next. On their own teaching there is nothing in the

least impossible in the Gospel story, and the very crown and culmination of Man in its Head must needs be in touch with the human constitution in its entirety.

So the Christian believes, and to this even reason alone would seem to point.

In this connection let us quote Mrs. Besant once more, who in "The Changing World,"* when speaking of the development of the individual human being from the divine germ with which he is created, says, "That its evolution and unfolding may go forward, it is necessary that this divine germ should come into contact with matter. Hence veil after veil of matter enwraps, is appropriated by this divine germ . . . in order that by contact with matter . . . the powers within him may unfold and the matter that he appropriates may become his servant, his instrument of manifestation." More and more, as we read, does it appear to us on the Theosophist's own showing, perfectly natural and intelligible that the Supreme Head of Humanity, the Logos should place Himself in the same conditions in order to be in full *rapport* with His own human creation, and therefore "enwrap Himself in matter."

Why, since the doctrine of the Incarnation seems to follow almost necessarily on their

66 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

teaching, and to fit in harmoniously with it, have the Theosophists so persistently denied it, and so insistently reduced it to allegory shorn of its outward and physical aspect? It would seem to be due to their having taken over the old teaching of the Gnostics just as it stood in this matter, and quite unquestioningly. The Gnostics, as we know, regarding it as altogether incompatible with the dignity of God that His Son should actually go through the humiliation of life on the physical plane, and still more that He should submit to a cruel death, taught that it was a kind of phantom that went through these events and that Christ Himself had never been really subjected to them.

Let us note what was lost, a loss of tremendous value, on which great issues depended, by the assertion that Christ's appearance in the flesh was nothing but an illusion.

As Dr. Robinson says in "Some Thoughts on the Incarnation," it is the "conception of the unity and solidarity of mankind that is specially illuminated by the Incarnation . . . He united Himself with humanity . . . He took our humanity on to His cross . . . He took it through the grave and gate of death to a joyful resurrection . . . He asserted the sacredness of that humanity which was thus capable" (in its entirety, we would add) "of union with God.

He claimed the whole of our common life. No factor in its progress is excluded from His claim. All that is truly human is consecrated by the Incarnation. The human body has gained a new sacredness, since the Word became flesh. All life is seen to be sacred because Christ lived a human life." All, or much of this, would have been lost were the Gnostic view the correct one. True, much of this is taught spiritually from the allegorical point of view; but the visible link of God with humanity is absent, the appeal is infinitely less powerful, and, above all, Man falls into a duality, and one part of himself, as he exists here and now, becomes separated from the spiritual, becomes worthless, mere dross to be thrown aside and despised, is out of harmony with his higher nature, has no essential relation with it; and the outcome is the Eastern system of crushing the body, ignoring it, and conquering it by annihilating it and its desires. But the doctrine of the Incarnation changes all this. The doctrine that the Logos took our flesh redeems instead of crushing the desires, brings them into use as the servants of God, transfigures our life here, illuminates and glorifies it, and our world, instead of being regarded as illusion, as dross, as something to be reduced to nothing, is seen to be a veil through which God is revealed, and as transfused through and through

by the Divine. It is a help, not a hindrance, and is a something to be brought to God to be hallowed, along with our bodies and our entire selves. Such is the effect, among other greater things, of the Fact that Christ took our flesh upon Him and walked this earth with us.

But to do something like justice to this great theme, we will quote from the article by Canon Scott Holland in the Supplement to the *Hibbert Journal*, published in 1909. He is speaking of the test of true faith as it is given in the First and Second Epistles attributed to St. John, namely the belief that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. "In the flesh": that was the cardinal verity. And why was it so crucial? Why did it signalise a radical difference between them (the Christians) and the Gnostics? Because they had come to the truth, not along Hellenistic, but Hebraistic, lines: and that means that they approached God from the point of view of the will, not of the reason. They looked for God to manifest Himself, not in ideas, but in acts. God was revealed by what He did. Through His actions, they might read His mind, they might interpret His character. But the knowledge so gained was given, not to solve any speculative problem, not to satisfy intellectual curiosity, but simply in order to establish a practical relationship, to bring God and man together in moral alliance, to

knit them into a living friendship. . . . God had put out power in man's behalf. He had brought to pass a great act of deliverance. This is the mystery now disclosed. This is the revelation.

"And, if so, then facts are everything. They are not symbols of an idea, which can be dropped when once the idea is apprehended. They are the real material in which the thing was done. . . . Every impulse that leads you to trust and adore the Divine Will, heightens the worth and intensifies the significance of the facts through which the Will has found expression.

"These were the presuppositions which underlay all Hebrew thought; . . . Under the influence of this Hebraistic mood and mind, it fastened on the reality of the earthly manifestations through the flesh. It was in and through the flesh that Jesus won, asserted, verified, and revealed His right to be the Christ and His claim to rise and reign. Those days in the flesh had now received their true valuation. Far from having lost importance, they had immeasurably gained it. For in them the deed was done by which humanity was re-created. If the re-creation is to be real, then the facts and acts by which it was achieved were real."

The re-creation—this is just one of the points in which, if we understand it, Theosophy differs so markedly from Christianity. For, according

70 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

to most of the expositions of Theosophy which we have read, there is no question of the re-creation of man. It is all a process of evolution. There has been no fall, no loss of his former estate which needs restitution. The Fall according to some was simply the descent of the spiritual germ into matter from which again he has to re-ascend by a natural process of evolution, which they call Resurrection. It is difficult to speak with absolute certainty on this point, for several Theosophic expositions speak of man as having failed over and over again in following out his destiny as he was meant to. Races are described as having arrived at such appalling wickedness that several times they were almost wholly destroyed by inundations of whole continents, much as it is described in Genesis, in order that man might make a fresh start freed from the wickedness that had been developed. But it does not seem that there was anything, any event that could be spoken of as a re-creation. It was merely a fresh start with people as yet uncontaminated.

This fresh start after the destruction of races or peoples that were hopeless failures is quite probable before the Incarnation of our Lord. But Christianity teaches that this great event re-inserted in man's nature something that he had lost, or perhaps had never at all fully possessed.

“Christianity,” as Miss Dougall puts it in an article in “Concerning Prayer,” “is the creation of a new nature.” In Christianity man becomes grafted on to the Person of Christ so as to become a branch through which the Divine energy can flow as the sap of the vine flows through its branches. This idea of the creation of a new nature in man, or the re-creation of something lost by a fall, is one of the unique features of Christianity, and one which stamps it, among other characteristic doctrines, as being a religion not only above and beyond all others, but as on another plane, although in its points also of strong likeness to the other religions, it marks itself as an advance upon them, and as supplying what they leave out, rather than as in actual contradiction of them. We shall find other points which show where Christianity is unique.

CHAPTER X

JESUS CHRIST, BUDDHISM, AND THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES

SINCE there is a close *rappo*rt between Theosophy and Buddhism, at least as this latter is popularly understood, and since, again, there is a considerable relation between Theosophy and the old Mysteries, it will be helpful to make some comparison of Christianity with each of these, as it will help us to understand how it stands in relation to Theosophy. And a more able treatment of this could hardly be found than that contained in Dr. Rudolph Steiner's "Christianity as Mystical Fact." As before mentioned, Dr. Steiner's treatment of Theosophy is one of the most recent, and more nearly approaches Christianity, perhaps, than any other form in which it is taught. Consequently his presentment of the contrast has a special interest for us.

To begin with, he makes an interesting contrast between the life of Jesus as related in the Gospels and that of Buddha. He says that the

life of Jesus contains more than that of Buddha. Buddha's transfiguration is at his death, whilst the most important part of the life of Jesus begins at His transfiguration. He does not die in it. "Buddha," says Steiner, "reached the point at which divine light begins to shine in man. He faces death. He becomes the light of the world. Jesus goes farther. He does not physically die at the moment when the light of the world shines through Him." He reached a higher stage of initiation. Buddha, at his transfiguration, "glows into the blissful life of a Universal Spirit. Christ Jesus awakes the Universal Spirit once more, but in a human form, in present existence." "Buddha," he continues, "demonstrated by his life that man is the Logos, and that he returns to the Logos, to the light, when his earthly part dies. . . . In Jesus the Logos himself became a person. In Him the Word was made flesh."

Steiner then refers to the initiation of the Ancient Mysteries, by which, he says, the divine was awakened in a man when he went through rites involving severe preparation, and such as could be attained by only the few. "What was enacted," says Steiner, "in the innermost recesses of the temples by the guardians of the ancient Mysteries has been apprehended, through Christianity as a historical fact. . . . In the Christian community the wisdom of the Mysteries

74 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

was indissolubly bound up with the personality of Christ Jesus. That which man previously had sought to attain through the Mysteries was now replaced by the belief that Christ had lived on earth and that the faithful belonged to Him."

"Henceforward, part of what was formerly only to be gained through mystical methods would be replaced in the Christian community by the conviction that the divine had been manifested in the Word present among them. Not that for which each individual soul underwent long preparation was now decisive, but what those had heard and seen who were with Jesus, and what was handed down by them. . . . And this immediate reality is to embrace all future generations in a living bond of union, and as a Church is mystically to extend from race to race." He continues, "To the confidence in the mystical forces which sprang up in the inmost being of man during initiation, was added the confidence in the One primordial Initiator." "The Mystics sought to become divine, they wished to experience divinity; Jesus was Divine, we must hold fast to Him, and then we shall become partakers of His divinity in the community founded by Him."

Dr. Steiner continues, speaking of the "Christ experience" as apart from Jesus, as the Theosophist always does, "In the Christ experience

is to be seen a definite stage of initiation. When the Mystic of pre-Christian times passed through this Christ-experience, he was, through his initiation, in a state which enabled him to perceive something spiritually,—in higher worlds, —to which no fact in the world of sense corresponded. He experienced that which surrounds the mystery of Golgotha in the higher world. . . . In that event enacted within the physical world, there is the same content as was formerly only in the supersensible facts of the Mysteries. Thus there was poured out on the Christian community, through the mysteries of Golgotha, that which formerly had been poured out on the Mystics within the temples. . . . Faith makes man an unconscious partaker of the mystical stream which flowed from the events depicted in the New Testament, and which has ever since been pervading the spiritual life of humanity."

Steiner, as previously mentioned, considers that the Gospel writers were all definite initiates of the Mysteries (namely of non - Christian mysteries) and "their intention," he says, "is to relate his "(Christ's) " life in the manner in which communications were made through the Mysteries. . . . They relate it in the way in which a Mystic would speak of an initiate. Only they give the initiation as the unique characteristic of one unique being. And they make

76 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

salvation depend on man's holding fast to the initiate of this unique order. . . . What was formerly the personal concern of each individual has become the common concern of all those who are willing to acknowledge Jesus as their Lord." It became an affair of the whole nation, and brought to the initiates the "Kingdom of God." "Christianity was to be a means by which everyone might find the way."

Here we have a great admission on the part of one who certainly does not view Christianity as we do, of the supreme purpose attained by Jesus Christ as Christianity teaches, namely that all could receive salvation, and that this unspeakable blessing was not limited to the few who could, according to ancient beliefs, go through a long and severe course of initiation, through elaborate and secret ceremonials combined often with almost impossible tests of endurance.

Dr. Steiner says again, "Jesus . . . has to become the initiation of the whole of humanity—and humanity was to be one community of Mystics. . . . The good tidings are announced to all, he who has an ear to hear hastens to hear the secrets. The voice of the heart is to decide in each individual case. It is not that one person at a time is introduced into the Mystery-temples, but that the word is to be spoken to all. . . . The whole world is a Mystery-temple. . . . Nothing

is to be withheld from anyone, the way is to be open to all. . . . Christianity transcends the limits of the old Mystery world. The separate mysteries were to be one universal one. . . . Such a generalisation naturally weakened their (the Mysteries') severe character."

How truly here has Dr. Steiner stated what constitutes perhaps *the* unique point that marks off and divides Christianity from all other religions. Good tidings announced to all: the whole of humanity to be a community of Mystics, the whole world a Mystery-temple, the way open to all, the voice of the heart to decide. What could better describe the universality of Christ's salvation for all who will accept it? Not one here and there is to enter in, salvation, spiritual initiation, is not limited to the exceptional person who can bear almost impossible tests, and lead a life of severest asceticism, but a gift to all who by faith become one with the incarnate Son of God.

"Christianity," says Dr. Steiner again, "was to be the means by which everyone might find the way; the Son came to seek and save the lost . . . Henceforth the kingdom of God was not to be dependent on outward ceremonies, but within you."

How true is some of this, and yet there is much which from the Christian point of view is not true.

78 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

Let us study Dr. Steiner's exposition of Christianity a little further. Although he recognises Christ as the Logos, yet He is not the Logos in a way that really differs from the divine element in humanity, at least so we understand it as given, for instance, in the following passage : "This Logos, metamorphosing itself in the many separate human personalities, has through Christianity been directed away from these to the one unique personality of Jesus. What had previously been distributed throughout the world was now united in a single personality. Jesus became the unique God-Man. . . . Jesus took upon Himself the divination of the whole of humanity. In Him was sought what formerly could only be sought in a man's own particular soul." (This is elsewhere described as the Higher Self.) "One did not any more behold the divine and eternal within the personality of a man. Hence," continues Dr. Steiner, "*the eternal, immortal part had been taken from it.*" After Christianity "Man was no longer capable of himself becoming divine in a greater or less degree. He was *simply man standing in a direct but outward relation to God.*"

We have put in italics some of the quite astounding statements given here as part of the Gospel of Christianity. The divine element in each individual man has been taken away and all

concentrated in Jesus Christ. Jesus is now the Logos because He has gathered up all the divine in man, taken it from him and absorbed it all Himself! Man is now only in an *outward* relation to God. He is only a human being now *minus* the breath of God. What of the inward light that "lighteth every man that cometh into the world"? The Christian believes that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Yet, we are gravely told that Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ, instead of diffusing His life, His Divine life, into men, took the Logos distributed throughout mankind and concentrated it in Himself, leaving men henceforth in a merely outside relation to God. There is more of this sort in "Christianity as Mystical Fact," but it is unnecessary to quote further to show how far even such Theosophists as approach most nearly to Christianity utterly misunderstand it. Further comment is scarcely necessary, even in order to sort out in the various quotations given the sometimes brilliantly given truth from the strange, though we feel quite unintentional, distortions of it, more than distortions, absolute and direct contradictions of it.

CHAPTER XI

THE HIGHER SELF AND THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

WE have found both Mrs. Besant and Dr. Steiner speaking of the doctrine that Christ took our flesh upon Him as if it reduced our union with Him to a merely external relation, an outside one, and as if it entirely cancelled or made null the inner relation. And we have seen that Mrs. Besant goes so far as to assert that Christianity lost sight of the inner relation so forcibly brought out by St. Paul, and the Theosophists lay stress on the doctrine of the "Christ within you," almost as if it were a teaching peculiar to themselves, and entirely neglected by Christianity.

It seems astonishing that anyone can think this mystical doctrine is ignored by Christianity. For Christianity, even in its narrowest teaching, emphasises the deep and spiritual relation of the believer with Christ, and that the "Kingdom of God" is within us.

But Christianity also attaches great value, we

may say essential value, to the external relation too, that is the looking to Our Lord as *something other* than ourselves, as a Person external to our personality, outside our own self. The Theosophists, as already said, lay exclusive stress on the inner and mystical relation with the Divine, but taken alone, without the Person external to ourselves to fix our eyes and heart upon, what is the result ? The result is the teaching of the "Higher Self," the doctrine that religion consists in finding the Higher Self, and that that is the "Christ within you." It is quite true that the Higher Self is taught as being a part of the Divine, of the Christ, of the Logos, but no matter how transcendental and spiritual may be this Higher Self, it is still a *self*. But the "self" is just what the Christian wants to escape from ; he wants to find himself in *Another*. He wants the emphasis to be on that Other, not on himself. The "self," however we think of it, is bound to be a limiting idea, no matter how much higher it may be than our ordinary self. What a loss merely to be finding oneself, however exalted ! How can one *love* oneself as one loves another ? How can one have that exquisite and self-forgetful devotion which the real Christian gives to Jesus Christ, for the self ? The tenderest relation is altogether removed in this loss of the Man Christ, and one's continual reference to the

82 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

Higher Self. Where is the glow and the glory, the illumination that is thrown over one's life by the love of another, and *such Another*, in this cold teaching of finding one's higher Self ?

Christianity is above and beyond other religions in just this point, that by the Incarnation taken in its literal sense, it embraces the inner relation with the outer. Christ is within us and without us. The relation is complete and entire ; nothing is left out, and the greatest attribute of the Divine—Love—is developed in its entirety.

How incomparably richer is the Christian thought ! It loses nothing of all that is wonderful and precious in the knowledge of Christ within us, but it adds another truth, the Christ other than ourselves that we can love and worship, who completes our life within and without, and glorifies the whole.

CHAPTER XII

IS THEOSOPHY COMPATIBLE WITH CHRISTIANITY ?—ITS ESSENTIAL OMISSIONS

MANY pamphlets have been written on this subject, some giving definite answers for, and some equally definite against its being possible at all to reconcile the two.

In answering the question we must bear well in mind that Theosophy differs from Christianity, as is so often the case with differing systems, far more in its negations than in its positive assertions. It *leaves out* much Christian doctrine, and this of the most important, and what we have to consider is whether its positive teaching necessarily excludes or denies these important doctrines.

To consider this we shall naturally take the doctrine of Reincarnation first, since this is the central teaching of Theosophy, and the one most likely to be in direct contradiction with Christianity. Is it so? Is it absolutely inconsistent with our Christian tenets?

We get into a very large subject here about which the Scriptures are silent, or nearly so, but it is noteworthy that nowhere do they directly contradict the idea of re-incarnation. The doctrine is held so almost universally by the Easterns, and they have devoted themselves so much to the Spiritual, almost to the exclusion of the material world, that it is difficult to believe there is no truth in it at all. It is an idea very alien to the Christian mind. These almost endless re-incarnations present a tedious, prolonged and well-nigh hopeless process of developing the soul. The Theosophists themselves tell us that the progress of the soul in this endless chain is almost inappreciable through many lives ; they teach that only those capable of going through special initiations, and a training in self-conquest of the severest character can make any decided progress. The whole conception of it leaves us weary and hopeless in the extreme.

But the speculation arises, as it has done before, whether this may not be some part of the evil which Our Lord's Incarnation was to save us from.

This stupendous event must have aspects far beyond our ken. We are continually finding new meanings in it, penetrating to greater depths in regard to it, and finding it, as we study it, solving more and more of our difficult human problems.

Why then may it not be that one among its many objects was to do away with this endless round of reincarnations ? The New Testament teaching in regard to the ultimate purposes in the mind of God in regard to this eternal truth was necessarily simple, vague, little defined. Its profound mysteries had to be presented just so far as man's feeble powers could understand them. The Gospel had to be revealed to " Babes," and to be simple enough to reach the simple and ignorant, as well as the educated and cultured. It tells us the " way of salvation," how to be saved from our sins, but tells us very little of its mysteries, very little of the dangers from which we were to be saved. And the language in which Our Lord had to express Himself was most inadequate for the wonderful things He had to reveal, so far as they could be revealed at all. He had to use the best similes He could find. He speaks of saving us from death, as probably the strongest expression He could use, but does not at all fully explain what is meant by that since it does not seem to have meant actual extermination.

What did it mean ? Far more, no doubt, than we can understand—miseries, perhaps, we cannot picture to ourselves, of which the hopeless round of reincarnations may have been part. And if so, what a substitute !

86 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

In Him we are grafted on to a Spiritual life; from Him we can receive a continual flow of energy; in Him we have One whose strength is made perfect in our weakness,—this weakness which before the Incarnation left us so forlorn, so absolutely helpless. In and through Him we are capable of starting forth on the spiritual path. In union with Him we are lifted onto another plane, a deeper element in our constitution is vivified, brought into action, into life, and, although Christian endeavour to attain the highest can never cease, we must still struggle, although the path is still upward and difficult, in and through the Incarnation it is a possible path, even for the simplest, for the ignorant, and in Him the struggle is bound to be crowned with success. In Him may we not believe, if there is any truth in the teachings relative to reincarnation, the hopeless round is at an end, and the spiritual development makes progress henceforth in union with Christ?

We have seen, therefore, that the Theosophic doctrine of Reincarnation does not necessarily militate against the central doctrine of Christianity, it only makes our need of saving grace more, not less.

We will conclude this subject by quoting from an interesting article on Modern Theosophy which appeared in "The Dial" for February,

1914, by Michael Wood, in which occurs the following passage : " It cannot, I think, be maintained that to accept as true this teaching (that of reincarnation) . . . is necessarily incompatible with Christianity. Two priests, one of the Anglican and one of the Roman Communion, both theologians well versed in the Catholic Faith, and both men of undoubted orthodoxy, have told me they perceived nothing in this doctrine which was positively contradicted by the Catholic religion ; so that it was permissible to hold it as ■ ' pious opinion.' "

We next come to the Law of Karma. There is nothing here that opposes itself to Christianity, if the doctrine of reincarnation be accepted. No one will doubt that certain results on the character must be produced by our actions and our motives for action. But here again Christianity seems to fill in something left lacking by Theosophy. According to the latter, the law works quite inexorably, nothing can modify the results or soften them except patient acquiescence in bearing them. Just here, to the Christian, comes in again the great doctrine of Redemption, of mercy shown to the sinner, of relief from the burden of his past. " His own self bare our sins." Surely this implies something even more than forgiveness, something towards mitigating the consequences of our sins. Theosophists are

strong in their teaching about our inexorable deserts. Many who are not Theosophists take the same line. Scientists are never tired of pointing out that Nature is relentless. Her laws once broken, there is no escape from the consequences. True, but where Human Nature is concerned other laws come into play, other considerations. Do we leave a naughty child who has broken his leg through disobedience to suffer the penalty of lameness for the rest of his life, saying that he deserves it and that we must on no account soften the results of his act ? Human nature does all it can to redeem, as it were, the misfortunes it has brought on itself in this outer life. All philanthropy aims at this, and to a considerable extent successfully. The results of our acts are not necessarily and inevitably given over to the consequences they would produce if left to their natural outcome. Human nature acts with mercy, how much more so Divine Nature !

It is argued that it is weak that men should desire or hope or ask for a mitigation of the sentence they have brought on themselves by folly or sin, and anti-Christians are apt to urge this.

Yet, the forgiveness of God is in its very nature an act of Grace, that is, a gift bestowed where there are no deserts. Grace is defined as unmerited mercy. Theosophy says that Karma

must be worked out, all its consequences endured and the debt paid without any quittance to the last farthing. In the Christian doctrine, where there is repentance and a right spirit, the Grace of God hastens the working out of the results of our sins, even may cancel the debt, as in the parable of Our Lord where the servant is forgiven his debt, and held very blameworthy for not also wiping out the debt owed him by his fellow-servant. This spirit of tenderness in Christianity, this willingness on the part of God to mitigate the awful inexorability of things is one of its great beauties and characteristics, one of the points that mark it off as so distinctive. Grace, unmerited mercies, "in that while we were yet sinners"—here there is no question of deserts, no weighing out of exact penalties due, but the melting out of evil, as it were, in the furnace of Divine Love.

Here then, again, we find Christianity filling in a great blank left in Theosophy. This system is not so much cancelled as filled in by Christianity, and we claim that Christianity completes, or at least partially includes Theosophy, the reverse of the claim of the Theosophists, which is that their system fills in and completes Christianity.

As to the complicated scheme of the Universe expounded by Theosophy, Christianity teaches little or nothing. Here Theosophy does fill in, if

true, an amount of detail with which Christianity has no particular concern, just as the Natural Sciences do.

It is open to anyone to accept or reject it according to the way it may strike him, as in line, or not, with what he already knows, or as offering, or not, solutions of an intelligible character of the many problems which the Universe presents.

The process of evolution may have been in the past much as it is described by the Theosophists, but so far as humanity is concerned, the Christian must believe that the future process of man's development has been considerably modified, nay, essentially changed by the great fact of the Incarnation.

We have now found in our comparison of Theosophy with Christianity that the great and essential difference lies in the rejection by Theosophy of the Incarnation, the great central Christian doctrine that Christ actually took our flesh upon Him and became man, and that most of the points which call for criticism follow from this.

The other side of the truth about Christ, the purely spiritual side, that which constitutes what we may call the truth as set forth in *living Allegory*, is in many of the writings of Theosophists set forth both beautifully and helpfully.

They lay great stress on the necessity of spiritual development, on the finding of Christ within us, on the Kingdom of God, often quoting St. Paul with deep sympathy and understanding. They word these truths in a fresh manner, and so give them a new setting which is attractive, and is often helpful in bringing out their force. It is not in this, but in their negations that they militate against Christianity, and cause, as we believe, great and serious loss.

The denial of the Incarnation has wide and far-reaching results. Some of these have already, although all too slightly, been pointed out.

But we should like to state here again more particularly that the idea of Redemption, as understood by the Christian, seems altogether foreign to Theosophic teaching.

According to this, the progress of man is an almost infinitely slow and uninterrupted process of evolution. And yet, no, it is incorrect to say that the process they describe is never interrupted, for, as mentioned earlier, they tell us that many times a race, or part of one, has been by some great cataclysm blotted out in order that mankind might make a fresh start, and this fresh start is stated to have been under the leadership of some very exalted, half-Divine Being.

But there is no idea here of Redemption, of the Divine process of bringing good out of evil, of

transforming it by what we might almost call a Divine Alchemy—not evil destroyed, but changed, as it were, by that marvellous process which makes Mephistopheles in *Faust* lament that he is always willing evil, but only succeeds in producing good. The Christian is taught that through Our Lord's Incarnation this process is always going on, evil so used that good comes out of it,—sin is forgiven, wiped out, good wrung out of evil.

Before concluding we must say a word regarding the Ethical teaching of the Theosophists. Their Moral code, as set forth in their books, is of the highest, and differs little from that of Christianity. Especially is their teaching on human brotherhood exalted in its ideal. So much do they make of this that Universal Brotherhood is put forth as one of the most prominent objects of their Society.

They claim it as an ideal almost peculiar to themselves, alas ! probably because Christians have so lamentably failed in carrying it out. The Theosophists emphasize to an exceptional degree the transcendental or mystical relation that exists between all created beings as included in the underlying Oneness from which all creation proceeds.

Nevertheless, however poorly carried out, to our shame, the ideal is particularly emphasized

by Christianity, especially in the Epistles of St. Paul as he gives it in passage after passage. Never has the bond of brotherhood been better expressed than in the so well-known passage in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that body, being many are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, bond or free." And again, "we are members one of another . . . we are members of His body."

Here we find, as we do not find in the expression of brotherhood in Theosophy, Jesus Christ who has come in the flesh, standing as the Head and Crown of this human brotherhood.

Further, Theosophy offers us no "means of Grace." Though sympathetic towards the Christian ceremony of Holy Communion, and of course understanding the use of the same elements in pre-Christian ceremonials, the Theosophists naturally do not read in the immense added significance with which this solemn ceremony was endowed by Our Lord. The denial of His life in the flesh must inevitably result in the misunderstanding of a rite which continues in an endless succession of acts the ever-repeated union of the inner and spiritual and Divine with the outer and physical.

94 THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

Finally, we miss in the Theosophic teaching the superhuman aid to the Christian bestowed on those who would follow the upward and thorny path that leads to the higher life by union with Christ Himself in prayer and meditation, who not only points out the way to us, but *is* the Way, who not only shows us truth, but *is* the Truth, in whom if we abide, and He in us, much fruit can be brought forth, and by whom, if we have faith, we may remove "mountains."

Again, Theosophy offers no personal object of worship ; we miss the Divine Person on whom we can lavish our highest, our supremest love and devotion, in whom our love for our brother finds its highest sanction and completion, and who embodies to the full the ideals and aspirations of our hearts.

We have often heard people complain that the system of Theosophy is so cold and comfortless. This is doubtless owing to the absence of the close personal relation with Christ which He made possible by His Incarnation, and by which are revealed to us truths of the most ineffable description, truths which can satisfy our hearts to their depths, and which can save in our uttermost need.

THE END

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